

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Addition to Wall Creek WMA, Purchase of Premier Bank Property

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Preliminary Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The Premier Bank Property purchase would add 640 acres of key winter range grassland habitat to the northern border of the Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (currently 6,557 acres) in the Madison Valley. Its primary goal is to expand habitat and tolerance for wintering elk. Other benefits include fawning and summer pronghorn habitat, and increased public hunting opportunity for elk, pronghorn, mule and white-tailed deer and Hungarian partridge.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has worked with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation on this proposed project. There has been no other public involvement to date. Upon Commission endorsement, FWP will conduct appropriate public review and analysis.

Alternatives and Analysis

The alternatives are to either purchase the property or not. Purchasing the property would increase the size of the WMA by about 10 percent, a place where about 2,000 elk winter. This would expand habitat and tolerance for wintering elk in the Madison Valley, which is imperative for the population itself and to prevent game damage issues. Other benefits would be increased security for fawning pronghorn, and public hunting opportunity for elk, deer, antelope, and Hungarian partridge. The land has high conservation values, as it is adjacent to FWP and BLM lands. Purchasing the property will require additional weed control and perimeter fencing to bring the property up to WMA standards. If FWP doesn't purchase the property, it is likely to be sold and further developed. Development in the area will result in loss of elk habitat and a likelihood for conflicts with wintering elk and other WMA habitat values.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends proceeding with purchase of the Premier Bank Property as an addition to Wall Creek WMA. The purchase would expand and enhance important habitat for elk and pronghorn, and enhance hunter opportunity along WMA and adjacent BLM properties.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission give preliminary approval for FWP to begin negotiations and related work on this addition to Wall Creek WMA.